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ABSTRACT

This study examined the congruence between the ratings of level of functioning (LOF) by parents of children with emotional and behavior disorders and LOF ratings by the professionals providing services to these children. Specifically, it examined the relationship of parent-professional congruence on LOF ratings to parent satisfaction with their children's mental health services and the degree of parent-professional collaboration. Parents (n=76) of youths receiving mental health services at mental health centers in Washington state completed the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, the Family/Professional Collaboration Scale, and the Ecology Rating Scale (the LOF scale also completed by professionals). Major findings indicated: (1) parent satisfaction was significantly correlated with parent-professional collaboration; and (2) there was no significant correlation between parent-professional congruence on ratings of child LOF with parent satisfaction with services. Overall, the study suggests that global service satisfaction is more related to characteristics of the parent-professional relationship than the degree of agreement in how they view the severity of the child's difficulties. (DB)

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Authors

Introduction Method Results Discussion References

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Introduction

Parents of children with emotional and behavioral disorders often feel that they are not treated as equal partners in their children's services (Collins & Collins, 1990). Often, they are not consulted by professionals regarding the needs of the children (Evans, Armstrong, Thompson, & Lee, 1994). Parental participation in children's treatment decisions, however, has begun to be a mental health system goal that is embraced by both family members and mental health professionals (DeChillo, Koren, & Schultze, 1994; Evans et al., 1994; Friesen & Korloff, 1990). Indeed, parent-professional collaboration is being recognized as a component of professional service delivery (Friesen & Schultze, 1992; Edelman, Greenland, & Mills, 1992).

There has been a lack of research into the relationship of collaboration to other service goals such as satisfaction and parent-professional agreement about child treatment priorities. The present study sought to (a) replicate and expand upon findings of DeChillo et al. (1994) that suggest a relationship of parent-professional collaboration to parents' satisfaction with their children's mental health services; (b) explore the relationship of parent-professional congruence on ratings of level of functioning (LOF) to degree of collaboration; and (c) examine the relationship of parent-professional congruence on ratings of LOF to parent satisfaction with services.

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Method

Participants

Parents (N = 76) of youths receiving mental health services at six rural and urban community mental health centers (CMHCs) in Washington state participated in this study as part of a longitudinal study on regulatory reform. Mental health professionals completed surveys on a total of 41 youths. The sample of youths was 71% male, 8% ethnic minority, and ranged in age from 4 to 18 years old. The most common DSM-IV diagnoses were adjustment disorder (44%), attention deficit disorder (22%), and oppositional defiant disorder (14%). Ninety-three percent of the sample was Medicaid-eligible.

Instruments

Parent Survey

The Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8; Attkinson & Zwick, 1982), an 8-item parent report of service satisfaction, originally developed by Hargreaves and Attkinson in 1978, is rated on a 4-point scale. This widely used scale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency (alpha = .93).

The PSU Family/Professional Collaboration Scale, a 20-item questionnaire, was constructed by DeChillo et al. (1994). This scale asks parents to rate their child's mental health professional's responsiveness toward them on a 4-point scale. There are five factors which are considered in this scale (i.e., supportive understanding, accessing services, sharing information, utilizing feedback, and overall collaboration).

Parent and Professional Survey

The Ecology Rating Scale (ERS) was developed by quality assurance staff at a local CMHC with input from family members of consumers and mental health providers. The 7-item questionnaire, rated on a 5-point scale, measures behavioral/emotional impairments in the following life domains: (a) family, (b) school, (c) emotional, (d) legal, (e) recreational, (f) health, and (g) social. This scale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Srebnik, 1996; alpha = .70 for parent raters; alpha = .69 for professional raters).

Results

Examining the relationship of parent-professional collaboration to parental satisfaction with their children's mental health services, a significant correlation was found between the CSQ total score and the total score on the Family/Professional Collaboration Scale ($r = .76$, $p < .001$; see Table 1).

The relationship of parent-professional congruence on

The relationship of parent-professional congruence on ratings of LOF to degree of collaboration was also explored. As a first step, differences between parent and professional ratings of LOF, using the ERS, were calculated using t-test comparisons. Parent and professional ratings were significantly different in the following domains: (a) family, (b) legal, (c) health, and (d) social (see Table 2).

The total ERS discrepancy score was then calculated (i.e., the difference between parent and professional ratings in each life domain of the Ecology Rating Scale). This discrepancy score was not significantly correlated with the total score on the Family/Professional Collaboration Scale. ($r = -.154$, $p <$ ns; see Table 1).

The relationship of parent-professional congruence on ratings of child LOF to parent satisfaction with services was also explored. However, there was no significant correlation found between the total ERS discrepancy score and the CSQ total score ($r = .161$, $p <$ ns; see Table 1).

Discussion

The results of this study reaffirm the findings of DeChillo et al. (1994) that parent satisfaction seems to be related to parent-professional collaboration. Parents and professionals in this study, however, seemed to differ in their perceptions of children's level of functioning in several areas. Professionals perceived family and social domains as areas of greater child impairment; parents perceived legal and health domains as areas of greater child impairment. One explanation for these differences may be professional emphasis&endash;given training in family systems approaches and negative peer group influences&endash;on family and social impairments. Parents, embedded in the family, may also be less likely to perceive the family domain as a child's main problem area. Both of these divergent perspectives on child functioning may be valid; parents and professional should continue to form partnerships where the open exchange of ideas and information is encouraged.

Parent-professional collaboration does not seem to be associated with congruence of parent-professional LOF ratings. One explanation for this finding may be that parents perceive the interpersonal and supportive aspects of the collaborative relationship as more important than a shared view of their child's functioning. This interpretation is supported in part by the relationship found between parent satisfaction with services and perceptions of collaboration.

Satisfaction does not seem to be related to congruence of parent-professional LOF ratings. Again, parent satisfaction may depend on a number of factors (e.g. service availability and treatment outcomes), and divergent perspectives on child LOF may not play a major role in parent evaluation of services. Furthermore, a global satisfaction rating, such as the CSQ, may be less useful than a measure of satisfaction

the CSQ, may be less useful than a measure of satisfaction with individual service providers to investigate parent-professional agreement. It could also be that the relationship of satisfaction to congruence in LOF ratings is mediated by the degree to which services are actually provided to meet identified areas of functioning. A next step to further this line of inquiry would be to test the relationships of LOF rating congruence, the extent to which services were provided to meet identified need and service satisfaction.

Overall, this study suggest that global service satisfaction is more related to characteristics of the parent-professional relationship (i.e. collaboration) than the degree of agreement in how they view the severity of the child's difficulties. However, in order to provide specific and appropriate services, the differences in the "lenses" through which parents and professionals view a child's problems should be addressed.

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